From reading to writing

From reading to writing: evaluating the Writer's Craft as a means of assessing school student writing

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Abstract: This article reports on part of a study investigating a new writing assessment, the Writer's Craft, which requires students to read a stimulus passage and then write a continuation adopting the style of the original. The article provides a detailed analysis of stimulus passages employed within this assessment scheme and students' written continuations of these passages. The findings reveal that this is a considerably more challenging assessment writing task than has previously been recognised; and that questions arise concerning the nature of the stimulus passages and the extent to which the assessment criteria captured what the students had achieved in their writing. The implications of these findings are discussed and recommendations are made.

Keywords: narrative, genre, student writing, assessment criteria

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1. Introduction

One current thrust in the assessment of writing is to move to forms of assessment that go beyond the 'standard' task of students constructing their own writing in response to a stimulus title. As part of this movement, one alternative approach that has gained ground is that of assessing writing by asking students to produce their own continuations of a short extract from a piece of narrative fiction. While this can be viewed as having the advantage of both providing some initial structure and testing students' understanding of, and capacity to produce, particular narrative genres, important questions remain concerning this approach. In particular, if such a form of assessment is to be deployed successfully it would seem to be important to gain an exact sense of the nature and demands posed by the particular stimulus passages that are employed and to make a fine-grained examination of how students continue these narratives. This article takes ahead these two key concerns by examining closely one particular national assessment of writing, known as the Writer's Craft, which has been used in the Scottish educational system since 2003.

1.1 The Writer's Craft and the assessment of writing in Scotland

In Scotland national writing assessments, such as the *Writer's Craft,* are assessment tasks designed centrally to be used by teachers to confirm their judgements of students' levels of attainment (see Appendix A for the criteria for teachers' internal formative assessment of writing). Thus the *Writer's Craft* can be seen to form part of the mainstream curriculum. Attainment levels are graded into levels A-F, with F representing the highest level. At levels A-E the writing test consists of two units, one *Imaginative/Personal* and one *Functional*, whereas for Level F the writing test consists of one unit, *Writing about Texts*. Handwriting is not assessed in national writing assessments.

The *Writer's Craft* assessment requires students to read a stimulus passage and then write a continuation of the stimulus, adopting a style similar to that of the original author. There are a number of stimulus passages suited to different levels, from which teachers can choose; the two passages selected by the teachers we observed were *The Night* and *The Magic Horse* (see Appendix B).

The *Writer's Craft* assessment was designed to afford students the opportunity to demonstrate the reading skills, knowledge and understanding acquired and developed during their work on the attainment target *Reading to Reflect on the Writer's Ideas and Craft*. The *Writer's Craft* assessment can be offered in place of either the *Imaginative/Personal* or the *Functional* writing test – as long as teachers have evidence of student attainment in that test genre. These national *Writer's Craft* tests are administered summatively to students across the 5-14 age range, from Primary 1 (age 5) to Secondary 2 (age 14); and then assessed internally by teachers who award a level between A-F, using national criterion statements set out in Appendix C. These assessments may then be subject to external moderation.

The assessment criteria associated with the *Writer's Craft* task focus on the student's capacities in both reading and writing. First, the student must be able to read and reflect on both general genre features, and particular stylistic features, of the stimulus text. Second, the student must be able to reproduce such features in their own writing. The criteria used for assessment stipulate that deficiency in one area should not necessarily result in a failure to attain a given level, but that most of the descriptors of competencies associated with a given level must be met in order for a particular grade to be awarded.

1.2 Research questions and focus of this article

The wider study on which this article draws examined the teaching, learning and assessment of first year secondary school students who were preparing for the *Writer's Craft* national writing assessment. In this article we report findings related to two of the research questions which featured in this wider study, i.e.:

1. what literary and linguistic features characterised the stimulus passages provided for the assessment?
2. what literary and linguistic features characterised the students' continuations of these stimulus passages?

Pursuing these two questions necessarily entailed a detailed analysis of the test passages to be used as the stimulus for writing and of the students' narratives. As the concluding discussion will reveal, addressing these two research questions has allowed us to make observations on the degree to which the assessment criteria are able to capture key features of students' performance on the task.

The following section of the article provides a review of relevant literature on the assessment of writing. Given our concern with analysing students' narratives, attention then turns to a consideration of writing, narrative and genre theory, with particular attention being given to the language of students' narratives. This is followed by an account of the frameworks and systematic processes employed in analysing the stimulus passages and the students' texts. The findings section sets out key features of the form and function of the stimulus passages and presents salient elements of the students' writing that emerged from our analysis, thereby allowing central concerns and conclusions to be highlighted in the final discussion.

2. Research context for the assessment of writing tasks such as the Writer's Craft

In parallel with research into the writing process and how writers learn to write, many academics have investigated the difficulties and challenges associated with the assessment of writing. In 1990 Huot produced an extensive review of the literature on writing assessment and identified three main procedures commonly used for assessing

the quality of a piece of writing: primary trait, analytical and holistic. Primary trait scoring requires the assessor to identify how well the writer has taken account of the rhetorical situation created by the purpose, audience and situation; analytical scoring focuses on particular qualities associated with good writing (with higher order skills such as content deemed to be more important than lower order skills, such as punctuation) and the assessor identifies how many components the writing contains; and holistic assessment reflects the assessor's evaluation of the overall impression of the quality of the writing using scores on a scale. Huot (1990) suggested that writing research since the 1970s can be divided into three main areas: the first includes investigations that analysed textual features of writing and focused on content analyses of assessors' comments and the correlation of a number of textual features to assessors' judgements; the second group explored how writing tasks can influence both the writer's and the assessor's judgement (Ruth & Murphy, 1988); and the third focused on the extent to which assessors' knowledge about reading affected their assessment of writing. Highlighting the perceived limitations of such approaches, Huot called for 'additional research and theory about the direct evaluation of writing… [as] the field has been in a state of neglect. Direct assessment has been allowed to become the most common means of writing evaluation without really being tested about how the rating procedures influence reading and judgement' (p.257).

2.1 Research on assessment rubrics and their usefulness

In 2006, Meier, Rich & Cady noted that many of the studies examining the effectiveness of assessment rubrics for writing tended to be descriptive and argumentative rather than experimental, and in an attempt to address this perceived gap, Rezaei & Lovorn (2010) investigated 'the reliability and validity of rubrics as effective tools for assessment … *through* writing rather than *of* writing' (p.19). Their work arose from the recognition that although rubrics were perceived to be tools that increase reliability and validity in teachers' assessment (Spandel, 2006; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007), the use of rubrics may not guarantee effective assessment (Tomkins, 2003). Rezaei & Lovorn (*ibid*.) asked raters to assess two pieces of work on two occasions, once without a rubric and once with a rubric, and found that raters were significantly influenced by the technical aspects of the writing rather than the content, even when a rubric was used. These findings reflected those of other researchers (Read, Frances & Robson, 2005). They concluded that using rubrics 'may not improve the reliability or validity of assessment if raters are not well trained on how to design and employ them effectively' (p.18). When discussing the widely held belief (Silvestri & Oescher, 2006; Spandel, 2006) that using a rubric improves assessor objectivity, Turley & Gallagher (2008) suggested that using rubrics simply makes subjective judgements more visible.

Jeffery (2009) undertook a large-scale study which examined the ways in which writing proficiency is conceptualised. Jeffery hypothesised that one way to establish how writing proficiency is conceptualised would be to explore the relationship between the

genre demands of a particular form and the criteria used to assess the piece of writing. She analysed the writing tasks set and the assessment criterion statements for both state and national writing assessments and the associations between the two. Her findings revealed that 'national assessments differ as a group from state assessments in the extent to which they emphasise genre distinctions and present coherent conceptualisations of writing proficiency' and she makes four recommendations:

1. explanations should be made available regarding the theoretical assumptions underlying the writing assessment design;
2. the use of rubrics with more transparent assessment criteria – such as Genre Mastery Rubrics – is recommended;
3. consideration should be given to common writing assessments that are better aligned with national and international assessments;
4. writing proficiency definitions should be clearly linked to writing assessment rubrics.

Jeffery concluded that: 'I emphasize that all these recommendations are based on the understanding, grounded in research, that transparency is vital for effective assessment practices' (Jeffery, 2009, p.17).

2.2 Research on writing and genre theory

Research into writing and its assessment has shifted from a focus on the end product to the actual process of writing (Graves, 1981; Smith, 1982); the purposes and audiences for writing (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod & Rosen, 1975; Bunting, 1998); the cognitive processing which occurs at each stage in the process (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1985); and the need to view writing not only as the product of an individual but also as a social and cultural act (Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1997).

Of particular interest to researchers investigating writing and its assessment has been the work of the genre theorists whose research has had a significant impact on pedagogical practices used by teachers of writing (Wray, 1985; 1988; Wray & Lewis, 1997). A genre approach to the teaching of writing is particularly germane to the concerns of the current study in that to succeed at all in providing a continuation of a stimulus text would seem logically to entail that a student has the capacity to understand the nature of the stimulus and how it achieves its effects as a piece of writing.

Debates over the nature of genre and over its teaching have been intense and here we can only highlight approaches and issues that are particularly pertinent to the task that students were asked to achieve on the *Writer's Craft*. One approach to the teaching of writing has posited that different types of writing have clearly distinguishable and familiar patterns of underlying structural organisation and linguistic features, and the role of those charged with developing students' skills in writing is to familiarise them

with the specific generic features of each type (Wray & Lewis, 1997; Bunting, 1998). Similarly Harrison & McEvedy's definition focused on the structural features of a text and reflected a widely accepted use of the term: 'by genre we mean the overall structuring of the text which characterises different forms of communication' (1987, p.74).

Research undertaken in England by Halliday (1978) and in Australia by Martin, Christie & Rothery (1987) in English classrooms found that a limited numbers of genres dominated writing tasks, and that there was a very limited focus on teaching the underlying structures and linguistic content of these genres. Wray & Lewis (1997) noted that while most teachers were confident with discussing the audience for and tone of a particular piece of writing, analysis which focused on underlying structural and linguistic features of texts left many teachers feeling that they simply did not possess the linguistic skills required to teach their students about texts. They reported that during interview most teachers discussed narrative texts and that there was:

> … a general lack of knowledge of the range of texts, and at the least, a lack of shared vocabulary with which to discuss the text types. [The research] supports the hypothesis … that teachers need to improve their own knowledge about the 'structures, functions and variations' of language. (Wray & Lewis, 1997, p.11)

Further, when discussing the teaching of narrative writing there was little if any explicit account given of the generic or linguistic features of the genre that they were teaching. The literature reviewed in the preceding paragraphs thus advocates familiarising students with the constituents of particular genres; but notes a lack of sufficient attention in classrooms to what might be termed the 'fine print' of the analysis of texts.

The teaching about, and how to construct, genres is revealed as a particularly complex matter when one recognises, in Miller's words that 'genres are unstable entities' (Miller, 1984, p.163); and that even with narrative genres, it may be difficult for an expert, let alone a novice, to distinguish between sub-genres (Berkenkotter, Huckin & Ackerman, 1991; Freedman & Medway, 1994). Swales (1990) also highlighted the need to consider the roles that texts play in particular *environments*. To capture these text-role and text-environment dimensions, he adopted the terms *discourse, genre*, and *task* which are bound together by the communicative purpose. The teaching of genre skills essentially involves the development of acquisition-promoting text-task activities. The communicative purpose 'drives the language activities of the discourse community ... is the prototypical criterion for genre identity ... [and] operates as the primary determinant of task' (p.10). Making this insight specific to the activities associated with the *Writer's Craft*, there would seem to be a need to be alert to how the reproduction of a particular narrative text type intersects with the immediate purposes and demands of an assessment task.

2.3 Analysing narrative, and the development of narrative skills

The literature on genre theory and genre teaching has not been informed to the degree that one might anticipate by concurrent work on narrative; and for the purposes of this study that closely examines narrative texts it is necessary to highlight some key developments in narratology within the last few decades, and in particular the central role of tense in narration. Here Fleischman (1990) has provided insights and foci for analytical attention that resonate with the concerns that have informed our own work. Building on Genette's (1980) discussion of the inherent instability of present tense narration, she:

- focused on 'ungrammatical tenses' – the idiosyncratic and apparently unsystematic switching of tenses, principally but not exclusively in narratives, and in particular the intrusion of present tenses into past narrations;
- discussed grounding (the foreground-background contrast) and boundary marking in texts;
- explored 'point of view' of narratives and how involved the narrator is in the events recounted;
- analysed the historic present and the use of the present tense in narratives;
- argued that present tense should not be analysed as meaning 'contemporality with the speaker's present' but instead that 'timelessness' (in the sense of 'temporal neutrality' [should be] chosen as the basic meaning.)

While aspects of Fleischman's subtle account of matters such as 'narrative norms' (*ibid.*) and temporal perspectives have attracted critique and proposed revisions from writers such as Phelan (2003) there is broad agreement on the centrality of the matters that feature in the preceding list. Narratological theory and practice have also pointed up the key role of alternation of tenses with Wolfson (1979), for example, highlighting the central role that tense-switching between historic present and the past tense plays in the construction of a narrative. These are matters which have been taken ahead by a number of writers (e.g. Cohn, 1989; Neuman, 1990; Duchan, Bruder & Hewitt, 1995; Toolan, 2001; Phelan, 2003; Abbot, 2008; Bal, 2009; Fludernick, 2009).

The analysis of narratives produced by school students also needs to take account of work on the development of children's narrative skills, as summarised, for example, by Toolan (2001, pp.189-93). Investigating the course of the development of writing, Rothery & Martin (1980) analysed data from the writing of children of different ages, from kindergarten to high school. They found that narrative skills are acquired in a particular order and a step-wise fashion. Early writing regularly involves the record of a particular experience and the child's reaction to it; subsequently, children develop mastery of two different genres, one associated with narrative, the other associated with an 'expository' style, usually concerning analytic records. Early narratives involve temporally ordered 'recounts' of a sequence of events, often linked with temporal adverbs (e.g. *then*). At the time of transition to high school, i.e. close to the age of the students in our study, vicarious narratives typically develop as children begin to

understand how narrative may encode a point of view different from their own, and may address an imagined reader.

Foreshadowing the discussion of deixis and reference in the findings section of this article, it is worth noting here Martin's research on the narrative language of ninety British schoolchildren (Martin, 1983). Martin observed that reference may be achieved either by 'presenting' an entity (as essentially 'new'), or by 'presuming' an entity is known to the hearer/reader. 'Presuming' may be achieved through a variety of means, but is typically marked linguistically by use of the definite article. Sometimes what is presumed is a feature of the known world (homophoric reference, e.g. *the sun*); sometimes what is presumed has already been explicitly mentioned in the text (anaphoric reference, e.g. ***John***$_i$ *came in earlier.* ***He***$_i$ *was wearing jeans*.); sometimes what is presumed is achieved by 'bridging', i.e. the use of an expression that denotes a concept which is connected to a previously mentioned entity, e.g. *John didn't care about* ***fashion****, and would* ***wear any type of jeans*** *as long as they were cheap*. As Toolan (2001, p.193) observed, 'frequency of noun phrases involving bridging is not in itself an index of maturity: rather it is increasingly appropriate *recourse* to bridging that we should look for' [emphasis original]. We have been guided by this observation in our analysis within this study of the deictic and referential patterns we identified in the students' texts.

3. Method

3.1 The wider study

This current article reports on part of a wider research study that took place in the English department in a large state secondary school in Scotland. The study focused on the teaching, learning and assessment of first year secondary school students who were preparing for the *Writer's Craft* national writing assessment. Given that methods have to be fit for purpose (Donmoyer, 1996), we made use of a variety of closely linked approaches to qualitative research. Research objectives were pursued by:

1. focused observations of preparatory work of four target classes of first year students (informed by analysis of the teachers' planning documents, resources and materials);
2. focused semi-structured interviews with the four teachers whose classes were observed;
3. detailed analysis of the test passages to be used as the stimulus for writing;
4. assessment and analysis of the writing produced by students.

As we have indicated earlier, the present article focuses on items three and four in this list and addresses the research questions:

- what literary and linguistic features characterised the stimulus passages provided for the assessment?

- what literary and linguistic features characterised the students' continuations of these stimulus passages?

Accordingly the following account of methods centres on the frameworks and processes that featured in our analysis of the test passages and the students' writing. However, to give the reader a fuller sense of the methods employed in the wider study, we also describe our study participants and give a brief summary of the work of observation and interviewing.

3.2 Participants and the data set of students' writing

Four teachers, including the Head of Department, participated in the study. These participants' teaching experience ranged from four years to fifteen years. English classes in this school are set by ability; and the four classes we observed (Teacher A, with students working towards levels E/F in writing; Teacher B, working towards levels D/E; Teachers C and D working towards levels C/D) were fairly representative of the entire first year cohort though we did not see students (placed together in one class) who had not yet achieved levels A or B. Across the four classes observed there were ninety-two students in total, which was approximately a third of the entire year group. This large secondary school is situated in a small town within ready commuting distance from a city. Its pupils, who come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, have a wide range of abilities. Those involved in the current study are aged 11-12. (It should be noted that these classes formed part of the 'standard' curriculum. In other words, they were not developed specifically for this study.)

From the four classes, we collected a total of seventy-four pieces of writing which the teachers had assessed using the published criteria (twenty scripts from Teacher A; eighteen scripts from Teacher B; fourteen scripts from Teacher C; and twenty-two scripts from Teacher D). Missing scripts were due to student absence. When quoting from student scripts, we give information regarding the teacher (i.e. Teacher A, B, C or D) and an identifying number for the script.

The levels awarded to the students' work in this data set ranged from C to F. Grades C to E were awarded for responses to *The Night*, while Grade F responses were awarded to every response to *The Magic Horse*. Only one of the pieces of writing in the corpus was awarded level C. Differences between the various levels specified in the criteria for assessment for the *Writer's Craft* are summarised in Table 1, and the full criteria set can be found in Appendix C.

Table 1. Differences between levels of Writer's Craft assessment

Level difference	Narrative	Spelling and punctuation	Sentence structure
B to C	Deals with setting as well as character and events	Shows improvement in spelling of less commonly used words; shows increased accuracy in punctuation	[No mention of sentence structure at these levels]
C to D	Deals with scene as well as character, setting and events; displays understanding of the style and tone of the original	Spelling and punctuation are generally accurate	Shows increase in variety of sentence structure
D to E	Narrative (now also including atmosphere) should be an 'accurate and convincing' reflection of the stimulus	[No significant increase in demand]	Variety of sentence structure is appropriate for the stimulus
E to F	Replication of the style and tone of the stimulus should be 'sustained and convincing'	[No significant increase in demand]	[No significant increase in demand]

3.3 Observations and interviews

The wider study centered on the observations of these four teachers' first year classes as they were being prepared for the *Writer's Craft* national writing assessment. Over a period of three weeks each of the four teachers was observed on five occasions, with the fifth session in each instance focusing on the immediate preparation for, and administration of, the actual writing test. Each teaching session lasted between forty minutes and one hour twenty minutes. The lesson observations guided and informed the topic set for the interviews with the teacher participants. The interviews allowed us to explore not only the teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perceptions, but also how the teaching was executed.

3.4 Aspects of preparatory teaching for engaging with the Writer's Craft

While this article focuses on textual analysis, it is necessary to set a context for this analysis by giving a summary picture of the teaching that had guided the students'

efforts in continuing the stimulus passages. Different practices for learning about writing were adopted by the teachers we observed. (Teachers A and B were working with higher sets, and teachers C and D with mid-range sets.) From our observations of teaching Teacher A used what can be described as a 'wide-angled' approach in that she did not focus initially on giving students practice on the specific kind of exercise involved in the assessment but generally primed the students' awareness of genre by exposing them to different kinds of narrative, and involving them in the process of establishing relevant criteria for identifying the linguistic features of a particular genre. Rather than viewing this *Writer's Craft* assessment as separate from her ongoing teaching she was keen to treat the test as a natural extension of the work they had been doing.

Teacher C used what can be termed a 'narrow-angled' approach where students were given targeted training to meet the learning objectives of the *Writer's Craft* assessment. His students worked on passages of the kind they would be assessed on and they were encouraged to notice specific linguistic features of the text (the semantic fields from which the particular lexical items were drawn, and the varying lengths of the graphic sentences). However, in common with the three other teachers, there was little explicit teaching of any aspects of grammatical structure. In a similar way, Teacher D began with outlining to students exactly what would be expected of them in the *Writer's Craft* test. The lesson then moved to eliciting from students their understanding of the term 'genre', with the teacher structuring student responses under the following headings: setting; character; plot; theme; language. The focus in subsequent lessons shifted to the process of writing and how different writers use senses to create atmosphere.

Teacher B's approach could be characterised as having elements of a 'wide-angled approach' combined with the kind of very focused and targeted training for the *Writer's Craft* assessment that teacher C used. This teacher began by exploring with students their understanding of the term 'genre' and the specific literary and linguistic genre markers and underlying structures which were found in different genres, which allowed students to draw upon prior learning and also to focus on aspects of genre structures and markers with which they felt less secure. Attention in the following lessons then shifted to a short extract in the genre they would be required to write in the *Writer's Craft* test; and students were asked to assess each other's writing, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Teacher B pointed up for students what she was looking for in their writing and explained what she meant by: accurate spelling and punctuation; description; characters; setting; events; length; atmosphere; genre and style.

3.5 Analysing the stimulus and student texts: frameworks and processes

Drawing closely on the review of literature on genre theory and narrative, we worked independently to provide a detailed analysis of the stimulus passages to identify the

literary and linguistic features and underlying structures that were evident in each passage. Thus key aspects of the genres, such as narrative style and perspective, characterisation, setting, plot, tone, atmosphere, mood, structure, dialogue etc. were highlighted and, in addition, where genres seemed blurred or difficult to identify, this was noted. In taking ahead this work of analysis, we were concerned to note how foregrounding and backgrounding were achieved, with close attention being given to tense and tense switching, grammatical organisation and lexical choices. While there was a high degree of commonality in what emerged during these individual analyses, detailed explication of the grounds of our judgements and collaborative critique then allowed us to agree on what salient features could and should be highlighted and taken to our analysis of the students' writing.

Given that the *Writer's Craft* requires that the student must be able to reproduce central features of the stimulus passage in their own writing, it was necessary to have this more precise delineation of the nature of the stimulus passages and the challenges that they posed, rather than relying on more intuitive assumptions concerning their demands and level of difficulty. Accordingly, when analysing the students' writing we took to this process a set of agreed features and genre markers which in our view characterised the particular stimulus texts they were required to imitate. Characterising the stimulus texts in this detailed, systematic fashion thus allowed us to identify the extent to which individual students' narratives were alert to: the genre of the text and its main features and underlying structures; how the narrative style and perspective in the original could be taken ahead; characterisation and how characters might develop; the authors' linguistic choices, (including here tense, tense-switching, grammatical organisation and lexis), and use of figurative language to create particular effects. Coding the students' texts against a set of tightly defined literary and linguistic features was undertaken independently by each researcher. There was a high level of agreement between these independent codings and, where discrepancies arose, judgements were justified before resolutions were achieved.

While it was of central importance to provide a systematic view of the extent to which the students' narratives functioned as continuations of the stimulus texts, it was also necessary not to confine our attention to such an exercise of comparison and contrast. Students' narratives were read not solely as continuations but also considered as free-standing narratives in their own right. We thus remained alert to instances where they deployed narrative approaches which did not feature in the original stimulus but could, as we exemplify later, be viewed as appropriate. The outcomes of our analysis of student writing then allowed us to determine the degree to which the published assessment criterion statements captured what our own analysis had revealed to be salient features of students' writing.

4. Findings

In presenting our findings we provide an overview of the nature of, and demands posed by, the stimulus passages before we then focus on the students' texts. Given that the *Writer's Craft* requires students to produce a *continuation* of stimulus texts it was necessary, (as we have established in the preceding section), to analyse these stimulus texts in depth and at different levels. Accordingly, we turn now to provide a succinct summary of the nature of the key elements of the stimulus texts that emerged from our analysis: moving from the identification of narrative genre type, to their use of emplotment, characterisation and setting, and then to lexis and grammatical patterning.

4.1 Analysis of test stimulus passages

4.1.1 Passage 1: The Night

A summary characterisation of the text as a whole needs to note how generally 'simple' language is used to create tension. While there are no clear markers of a particular narrative sub-genre, (as these markers are conventionally understood), there are clear suggestions that this fits into the thriller/mystery category (the main protagonist is alone, there are inexplicable noises, and so on). In terms of narrative style, the third person narration appears to be all seeing, and all knowing – Ella's point of view is privileged, though not evenly throughout, because it changes from paragraph to paragraph. There is a clear sense of her voice/perspective when she is looking at the sleeping child, with an almost cinematic viewpoint here, as we see the scene through her eyes, hear what she hears (the storm), and sense what she feels (for example, her stance which emerges in expressions like *a fine start to the summer holidays*).

To continue the story, the students need to be aware of how the plot has been developed. The use of Ella's aural experiences is clearly a potential narrative hook, which begins building up the tension from the very first line; since the sound came *again*, the character can no longer simply dismiss it. A writer continuing this piece of writing might work out what is making the 'sound', which has the potential to lead the narrative in rather different directions: as a thriller, as a horror story, or as a parody of either of these genres. To do this, the writer would have to make use of intertextual knowledge of these different genres.

Awareness of setting and characterisation is critical. While the storm may be brewing outside, the rain sounds do not bother Ella and the writer's use of the pathetic fallacy reveals that what's brewing inside is of much greater concern. Lots of characters appear in this very short extract, with very little detail provided about any of them. The relationships between the characters are not clear, but are clearly important. The reader has to work out who Ella is, what the relationship between Fin and Ella is, why Ella felt sure she would be all right but no longer does, who Min is (and whether that matters) and so on. While all of these issues are potential avenues for the furthering of the narrative, the student is required to decide which to focus on, and why, before they can continue with the fictional narrative.

In terms of lexical features, the vocabulary used in this text is familiar and simple, in that it has a high proportion of 'native' words (that is, those of Germanic origin, such as *night*, *house*, and *sleep*). There are only a few words with Latinate elements (e.g., *metallic*, *promise*). Morphologically simplex forms dominate (that is, there is little in the way of derivation and compounding: exceptions include *metallic* again and *showroom*). Some words are drawn from a more informal register (e.g., *yakking*), and in terms of semantic fields, some aspects of the lexical choices create a degree of cohesion across clauses and sentences (e.g., *cutting … metallic*; *rain … storm*).

On first reading, grammatical features of the text also suggest a relatively simple structural organisation of the narrative. Intransitive verbs predominate (e.g., *came*, *stood*, *slipped out*), so the processes depicted typically do not involve one thing acting on another; rather, only one participant is involved for any given process (e.g., *the sound came*). In terms of the verbal semantics, finite verbs of motion often collocate in this text with inanimate entities as independent subjects, or as anaphors of relative pronoun subjects (e.g., *the sound came*; *a sharp, metallic tap that carried even to the first floor*); conversely, the animate entities in the house are often motionless (e.g., *Sam lay*; *Ella stood … listened*). Mental and verbal processes are clearly in focus (*she wished*; *Min and Mrs Meade would be yakking*; *Mr Meade would be trying to talk dad into …*; *she'd promised him*). Finally, the length of graphic sentences is usually above fifteen words, with three exceptions: the beginning of the third paragraph (*But that could be ages*) and the two sentences preceding the end of the stimulus passage (*But she wasn't all right. She was terrified.*).

However, there are some rather more complex grammatical patterns involved when one considers the overall structure of the discourse. In the first two paragraphs, one finds a number of clausal dependencies and embeddings (for example, nouns modified by relative clauses). There are further variations of basic clausal organisation in terms of information structure, such as clefting (*all she heard was rain spattering*). This degree of complexity in the syntactic organisation of the stimulus is much more characteristic of the first two paragraphs, while the second two are slightly reduced in syntactic complexity (for example, the three very short sentences in the final paragraph).

4.1.2 Passage 2: The Magic Horse

Like *The Night*, the narrative genre of this text is not immediately clear – it has the potential to develop into a fantasy story (if this is indeed a magical horse, the Kelpie), or an adventure (if it is simply a big black horse). In contrast to *The Night*, the narration is first person narrative. The critical narrative hooks in the stimulus concern the fact that the narrator has encountered a large black horse that could be a Kelpie, though there is no certainty that it is such as creature. The adventure element is suggested by the possibility that the narrator could ride the horse and save her family. But much of this is only hinted at: given the linguistic analysis of the text, the pervading sense of the initial encounter is that nothing happens at all.

In terms of setting, the stimulus passage is set in a place where magic might happen, suggested by a stillness as natural sounds die away (*nothing stirred*), in sharp contrast with the sound /movement of the horse (*I could hear the swish of its tail*). Jeannie's internal monologue is presented within narrative – so we know what she is thinking – and involves repetition, conditionals, and a rhetorical question which could be answered in the continuation. As for the horse, the reader is exposed to a clear physical description, along with hints about behaviour. To carry this on, the writer needs to establish the relationship between the rider and the horse, as this may matter a great deal.

There is, in fact, a clear sense in which the relationship between the narrator and the horse is explored in this extract. There are numerous instances of linguistic oppositions and balances which reflect this theme (*It watched me as I watched it; forward and back; head and tail*). As noted above, a strong sense of stasis pervades the text, created partially through lexical choices, and partially through grammatical organisation. The verbs selected are ones which depict minimal motion, or no motion at all (*stood, was, towered*). The focus is very much on states and positions of the nominal referents. The verbs are often in the passive voice, and are agentless (*were strapped*) or are intransitives (*its ears pricked*). Even transitive action verbs have semantics denoting only gentle action (*sniff at my chest, nudged me*). There seems to be a strong association between Jeannie and the horse that is marked by shared mental activities (*I knew exactly what it was thinking*) as a product of something supernatural (the toad bone).

4.2 Analysis of student writing

How then did the students fare in continuing these passages; and what salient features emerged when their texts were analysed as narratives in their own right, rather than simply as continuations? In this section we present points of comparison and contrast across the data set, using the gradings awarded by the teachers to the individual scripts as categories that readily allow the display of key similarities and differences. The following account draws together different 'levels' of the analysis of the students' narratives, pointing up the lexical, syntactical and grammatical means by which particular portrayals of narrative point of view, character, events and scene were achieved.

Looking first at how the one script which was marked at level C worked as a continuation, there was evidence of development of character, events and setting; and replication of a number of words from the stimulus. However, there was a change in perspective away from that of the stimulus text (marked by a shift from third to first person narration). This narrative also displayed tense changes that reduced its coherence, a number of spelling errors of fairly common words (e.g. *off* for *of*, and *of* for *off*; *swiched* for *switched*; *thingking* for *thinking*), and very little punctuation (e.g. *The storm has started thunder wind rain she was so scared*).

Pieces of writing which achieved either level D or level E (including some graded D+, not a formal grade associated with the task) also showed evidence of an understanding of character, events and scene/setting. In terms of narrative, all these responses continued the story from the point of view of Ella (e.g. there were no shifts to first person narration). This can be seen to link with the linguistic structure of the original passage; and in all cases, the students focused on Ella's perception of the events, as in quotation (1):

(1) Then she thought of an idea to sneak out of the house and go to the pub but she had second thoughts about that. She had to consider the facts; she was at the back of the house and the open door was at the front end of the house. [Teacher B: 11]

This response is sensitive to aspects of free indirect style. (The use of the deontic modal *have to* implies a source of authority which lays down the obligation, but in this case the source of obligation is Ella herself.) We return later to the issue of free indirect style in narrative. Writing at levels D and E typically demonstrated the following characteristics:

- there was significant use of non-standard spelling, (e.g., petrifid, all of a sudding), or non-standard morphosyntax (e.g., the storm was getting worser) [Teacher C: 12], general British non-standard verb morphology (all Ella seen was a huge tree coming towards her, [Teacher C; 8] and non-standard punctuation (She was really scared she didn't know what to do the storm was getting closer, [Teacher C: 9].
- consonant with the stimulus passage, there was evidence of variation in sentence length, e.g., When she reached the kitchen she switched on the light. Nothing happened. There was no sign of mum and dad or Fin. [Teacher B: 4]
- the rather simple grammatical structure of the passage is replicated, e.g., She stayed in his room and sat on the chair across from his bed. She sat there for what seemed like hours but was only minutes. [Teacher B: 16]
- the 'static' feel of the stimulus is created largely by the use of intransitive verbs. In such cases only one participant is involved in the action, e.g., Ella stood shaking with fear […] The footsteps started again. The metal shoes creeked on the wooden floor [Teacher B: 6]. Examples such as this also illustrate how finite verbs of motion (e.g., start) collocate with inanimate entities as subject (e.g., the footsteps), as well as illustrating the student's capacity for use of figurative language (e.g. metonymy)
- as in the original passage, mental processes predominate (particularly processes involving aural and visual perception, as well as thought and reasoning), e.g., Then the noise came again and it sounded louder. Terrified she stood waiting so she could hear the noise and find where it's coming from. Ella still stood, then Sam started to cry, but Ella didn't move, then she heard the tap and it was coming from the window [Teacher B: 13]

We will return in the discussion to consider the question of the capacity of the *Writer's Craft* assessment criteria to capture the matters highlighted in the two preceding bullet points, i.e., how students portray action, movement and mental processes in their narratives. Moving on, the following extract illustrates how students whose work was graded at level D can be seen to employ different narrative devices within even a short section of text (Teacher B: 13):

(2) The person was a tall and broad looking man who did have a bat but it was metal. "That is what the tapping was," Ella thought to herself. The man walked up to the window then pointed at her and walked away. Ella was frightened.

In addition to meeting the criteria regarding character (Ella is still the focus of the narrative), events (the curious metallic tapping noise in the exemplar has been explained) and scene/setting (the action is still taking place in and around the house in which Sam is sleeping), and the criteria regarding spelling, punctuation and varied sentence length, there is clear evidence of other genre markers being identified and used. For instance, notice that the adjectives used to describe the man involve not just Ella's subjective assessment, but also some doubt as to the veracity of her claims – he is not unambiguously broad, but 'broad looking'. Crucially, one feature of the syntax of the sentences describing the man's actions encourages the reader to focus attention on particular deictic marking of the spatial relation between Ella and the stranger (*walked up to the window*; *pointed at her*; *walked away*), but critically gives no further information regarding motivation for these actions, particularly the rather threatening pointing at her. The narrative perspective then shifts from Ella's physical/visual perception of events to her emotional response, and this is marked by a change in the sentence length (from a fourteen word sentence to the three word sentence *Ella was frightened*). This passage and others in our corpus would seem to highlight the need to understand how syntactic features relate to narrative perspective, a matter that has been explored by Fleischman (1990) and other writers on narrative (e.g. Cohn, 1989; Neuman, 1990; Duchan et al., 1995; Toolan, 2001; Phelan, 2003; Abbot, 2008; Bal, 2009; Fludernick, 2009).

Greater attention to the matters identified in the preceding paragraph goes some way to understanding why some scripts, though they typically met the criteria for spelling, punctuation, and sentence length, were assessed only at level D, and not at a higher level. It will be recalled that a characteristic of the stimulus passage from *The Night* is that the verbs typically describe Ella's cognitive processes and emotional reaction – very little happens in this short extract. In the continuations, however, there was often a tendency to describe a number of actions and events, rather than continue the exploration of Ella's emotions. However, there were some notable exceptions to this: one student, for instance, continued the narrative with an extended focus on one particular issue – the tapping sound, Ella's reaction to it, and finally the location of its

source. Students producing work at level D were also sensitive to further fine distinctions in the syntax of the stimulus passage. Some picked up on a common grammatical metaphor whereby verbs of motion in the stimulus often occur with non-human subjects.

(3) A quiet but eerie sound came from the hallway (Teacher D: 2)
(4) The sharp metallic tap came again (Teacher D: 2)

Others were attuned to the indeterminacy created by using words with very general semantics, and in the case of (5), one can discern a replication of the *all*-cleft structure as a way of information packaging in the stimulus passage.

(5) all she could see was rain and two black things running away (Teacher D: 6)
(6) Something was on the stairs, Ella was sure. (Teacher D: 14)

Contrastingly, some students provided detailed descriptions where the tension-building effects of indeterminancy in reference were lost, as can be seen in extract (7]:

(7) Ella decided not to think about the strange noise and turned the TV on. Nothing much to interest her except for the exciting highlights of the Manchester United and Barcelona Champions League match. (Teacher D: 21)

Turning to consider an aspect of tense, some features of spoken narrative were transferred to the written continuation, for example, the well-known sociolinguistic feature of the 'narrative present' for past events:

(8) The storm got closer and closer so she **walks** across the room and **lies** down beside sam (Teacher C: 9).

We return to examine the deployment of tenses in narrative construction in the following pages which examine the continuations of *The Magic Horse* stimulus text. Before we present findings related to *The Magic Horse* stimulus, it is important to make a final observation concerning *The Night* narratives. We have identified different ways in which some of the students' work displayed 'non-standard' features of spelling, punctuation, morphosyntax, etc. However, even where such 'non-standard' features were present, the continuations developed some aspect of the narrative in at least one of the following areas: character (the development of Ella as a character in terms of how she reacts to the storm), setting (the effects of the storm on the house), and events (what Ella does; how Sam behaves; in some cases, the arrival of other characters mentioned in the stimulus, like Fin).

Turning then to present findings relating to the continuations of *The Magic Horse*, it will be recalled that each script in this set was awarded level F, the highest level. We

first present a synoptic account of this set of scripts that then sets a context for a close examination of the students' capacity to read beneath the surface of the text. In particular we illustrate their distinct alertness to the *specific* devices by which time was represented in the original text; and consider how they employed free indirect discourse and narrative voice. Our account illustrates how some students went beyond a close-grained replication of the original to produce their own creative variations on its themes and devices.

Scripts awarded level F displayed the following features:

- in approximately half of the student scripts there were significant departures from standard spelling, punctuation and sentence structure, e.g., lunged myself at the huge, magnifasant horse. I was up and the Kelpie was troting along taking me somewhere like I was being carried to wildess. dreams. (Teacher A: 2)
- the large majority of the lexical and syntactic choices made by the students in their writing were consonant with those of the stimulus text, but in a minority of cases those choices, although standard in form, did not fit the style of the stimulus, e.g., I was next to a huge loch. I mean huge. It was the largest piece of water I have ever seen. I was getting scared and freaked out at this point. (Teacher A: 19)
- most responses adopted an appropriate narrative style, and in some cases achieved a sophisticated narrative perspective, as we will illustrate later;
- characterisation was appropriate across this set of texts as a continuation of the original, though several students developed the characters beyond the template of the stimulus text;
- the tone and atmosphere of the original text (that we have delineated in the preceding section) were in the main recreated with fidelity.

We look now in fine detail at the particular devices that were employed in the continuations of *The Magic Horse* to achieve temporal and spatial marking. This allows us to examine the students' understanding of free indirect discourse and narrative voice. While the main thrust of the following paragraphs is on the sophistication of the linguistic means by which the students achieved particular narrative effects, it is important to note first that even within these scripts marked at level F some inconsistencies in tense marking were evident (see extract (9) below).

(9) This bone **is** very special to me. It would keep me out of harm. It **has** never let me down before. So I slowly **took** tiny steps towards the Kelpie. (Teacher A: 5)

This varying temporal deictic marking is mirrored in other scripts by variation in spatial deixis:

(10) It was a huge river, and very deep in places. I knew it well, as I **had spent** many summers **here** as a child, swimming and having picnics in the sun. And **now here** I **was**, maybe for the last time. (Teacher A: 6)

However, this variation is rather different from the inconsistencies in tense marking that we have noted. First, it is actually a feature of the stimulus:

(11) It suddenly came to me that **this was** why I **was here.**

This is a feature of free indirect discourse which characterises some parts of the stimulus, and some of the students were very sensitive to such discourse. (Note, for instance, that (10) above marks the blurring of boundaries between temporal and spatial deixis by combining *now* and *here* – both proximal – with the past tense *I was*.) While the variation in tense marking alone cannot be justified by an appeal to awareness of marking of free indirect discourse (whether overt or covert), the variation in marking spatial deixis, in combination with past tense verbs, can be, as can the use of particular adverbs, as in (10) above, and also in (12), from another student:

(12) I wasn't sure. The Kelpie **took** a step closer, practically touching me <u>now</u> (Teacher A: 18)

Yet even this is not sufficient as an exhaustive explanation for the variation in tenses used by some of the students who achieved level F. In addition to the possibility that they simply got this wrong (as in example 9), and the possibility that they were trying to mark something as free indirect style (as in example 10), there is also the possibility of confusion arising from the nature of the stimulus itself. The first part of the text printed on the page is in italics, and serves (one presumes) to locate the 'real' stimulus within the context of the larger narrative (since the text is an excerpt from the novel *Quest for a Kelpie* by Francis Mary Hendry). However, nothing is explicitly stated to indicate this, and one of the students attempted to make use of this distinction between italicized and non-italicized text to render different 'voices' in the narrative:

(13) *Stupid girl she actually thinks she'll be the one to tame me.* The bone told me. My grandma had spent seven days + seven nights preparing the bone that allowed me to hear the Kelpies thoughts. […] Very suddenly I whipped off the saddle cloth and mustered my most dominating voice while shouting the ancient words from a lost language 'Sic volo'. *Noooo! She has complete control over me she shall pay. I will rip her in half with my god like strength just as soon as I am no longer inslaved.* (Teacher A: 9)

Notice that the shift in tenses correlates with a shift in whether the narrative voice is marked as 'italic' or not: present tense for the 'italic' narrative, past for the non-italic one. This brings an entirely new perspective on the nature of the text. The italicized portion of the 'stimulus' text ends with an expression of doubt that the Kelpie is what it appears to be: *Jeannie meets what she thinks is a Kelpie*. By attempting to mark some

parts of the continuation as 'italics' and 'non-italics', we are invited by the student to re-interpret the narrative organisation of the stimulus. Instead of reading the italicised section as a way of establishing context, we are now invited to read that section as another narrative voice (always in the present tense), potentially the voice of whatever it is that is currently inhabiting the body of 'what she [Jeannie] thinks is a Kelpie', contrasted not just via the typesetting but also via the tense marking, with Jeannie's narrative.

A conclusion that follows from the preceding paragraphs, and one that we return to in the following discussion, is that the *Writer's Craft* assessment needs to be clearer on what counts as stimulus and what does not. A further question in relation to the *Writer's Craft* assessment emerges when one notes that this student, while displaying a high level of narrative skill, also used some non-standard spellings, (e.g. It leped into the water with the grace of a swan), and did not follow standard punctuation practices, thereby demonstrating weakness in one area of the assessment criteria.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The findings presented in the preceding sections reveal a number of issues and concerns that need to be addressed if an assessment tool such as the *Writer's Craft,* which centres on students' continuations of a stimulus text, is to be deployed appropriately. As an initial point, it would seem to be necessary to give very close scrutiny to the nature of the original passages employed and the degree to which they are fit for purpose as stimuli. The two passages we examined could on an initial reading appear to be quite simple, but our close analysis revealed them to be more complex than they appear at first sight and to pose challenges in terms of identifying their narrative genre and structural organisation. In *The Magic Horse*, assumptions were also made about students' understanding of the relationship between the introductory passage in italics and the main text. There thus needs to be clarity about what part of a passage counts as a stimulus and what does not.

A writing test called the *Writer's Craft* can be expected to focus mainly on how narrative works and the literary and linguistic techniques used by the writer to create and sustain the narrative. However, some students did struggle to identify the narrative styles adopted by the writers of these passages. It could therefore be argued that the stimulus passages in some cases actually hindered these young writers as they tackled what is a considerably more challenging assessment of writing than has previously been recognised.

For those students who were able to rise to the challenges posed by the *Magic Horse* passage, questions arise concerning the extent to which the assessment criteria in the *Writer's Craft* captured what they had achieved. To imitate the stimulus texts successfully and replicate the narrative form, style, perspective and voice, students are required to do significantly more than appears in the reductionist criterion statements of the scheme. The criteria do not readily mirror the ways in which students portrayed

action, movement and mental processes in their narratives. We have presented evidence of students being highly creative in analysing textual structure and showing a deep understanding of the linguistic fabric of narrative, in ways that are not recognised in the established assessment criteria. Our analysis, which examined fine-grained linguistic choices, such as those concerned with tense and other deictic markings, revealed how some of the students showed understanding of the language of narrative in subtle ways. Accordingly a case can be made that the assessment criteria, in this and comparable schemes, should be concerned more with such fine-grained linguistic choices, and less with spelling and punctuation (which can be assessed elsewhere, for example in formal letter writing). The findings of the research presented here resonate with some of the claims made by Tomkins (2003), Read, Francis & Robson (2005) and Rezaei & Lovorn (2010).

Mention of spelling and punctuation raises the question of the weighting to be given to different criteria within a scheme such as the *Writer's Craft*. It is useful here to return to the example of the script produced by the student cited in quotation [13]. This piece of writing as a whole was judged to meet the criteria for the award of level F. If the assessment is attempting to identify whether the student is able to spell and punctuate according to the conventions of standard written English, then this student made some clear errors, and the award of level F is questionable. If the assessment is attempting to identify whether the student is able to think creatively about the nature of narrative, and the complexity of the linguistic structures used to render different perspectives on a sequence of events, then the candidate has done an excellent job, and the award of level F is justified. It would seem, however, that the *Writer's Craft* is attempting to assess both, without due attention to any ranking in the assessment criteria of linguistic features beyond spelling, punctuation and sentence type. The criteria at present do not help to resolve the question of whether an understanding of how narrative works mitigate failings in the use of standard spelling and punctuation, especially if other aspects of knowledge about language (such as verb semantics and argumentation, or deixis marking) have clearly been (implicitly) understood.

Turning to raise a conceptual point that moves beyond our analysis, but was prompted by it, there is a need we would suggest to reflect carefully on the *type* of continuation that is expected and rewarded in such a scheme. We have already argued for assessment criteria that provide a more fine-grained picture of what a successful narrative continuation would entail. Separate from that consideration, one can ask whether the stimulus passage should be seen simply as a means for a student to display the capacity to reproduce key features of the original, or serve more as a springboard for students to make an imaginative response. We noted in the literature review how Swales (1990) has highlighted the roles that texts play in particular environments and the centrality of communicative purpose. Opening up debate over exactly what communicative purposes the tasks associated with such stimulus texts are expected to achieve can inform discussion of exactly what kind of assessment criteria such schemes require. On the matters of communicative purpose and contextual understandings, we

recognise that gaining a fuller understanding of how the *Writer's Craft* functions in the school context requires not only the close focus on written products provided in this article but also a wider consideration of teaching approaches and classroom processes. This will be provided in a future article that reports the findings which emerged from the observations and interviews we conducted as part of the wider study of the *Writer's Craft*.

In conclusion, while we have raised serious concerns in the preceding paragraphs, we nevertheless believe that the *Writer's Craft* assessment *could* be an interesting and stimulating way of informing the teaching of this form of writing and assessing what students produce. However, in addition to the points made above, we would concur with several of Jeffery's (2009) conclusions. It would be useful for teachers if clear explanations were made available to them regarding the theoretical assumptions about writing that underpin the *Writer's Craft* assessment design and about exactly what such tests seek to measure. While we most certainly would not advocate a 'teaching to the test' approach to writing instruction, it is the case that teachers turn to assessment rubrics to identify what must be covered, and rubrics therefore inform both content and pedagogical approaches (Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Hillocks, 2002; Huot, 2002; Crawford & Smolkowski, 2008; Slomp, 2008). We therefore conclude that if the *Writer's Craft* assessment continues to be used, close scrutiny should be given to the demands posed by the stimulus passages and rubrics with more detailed and relevant criteria be provided – criteria which guide teachers, students and assessors towards a clearer focus on the underlying literary and linguistic features of the genre and the narrative style adopted by the writer in the stimulus passages. As we have indicated in the preceding paragraph this revisioning of the rubrics needs to be informed by wider debate on exactly what communicative purposes such a continuation task should be taking ahead.

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Appendix A

Table 2. National Guidelines English Language 5-14. Imaginative writing assessment criteria

STRANDS	LEVEL A	LEVEL B	LEVEL C	LEVEL D	LEVEL E	LEVEL F
Imaginative writing	Write a brief, imaginative story.	Write a brief, imaginative story or poem or dialogue, with discernible organisation and using adequate vocabulary.	Write a brief, imaginative story, poem or play, using appropriate organisation and vocabulary.	Write imaginative pieces in various genres, using appropriate organisation and vocabulary.	Write imaginative pieces in various genres, making some use of appropriate literary conventions.	• Explore forms of writing with quite complex structure and organisation; • attempt to create mood, develop understanding of point of view, and use language to create particular effects in imaginative pieces in various genres.
Punctuation and structure	In the writing tasks above, use capital letters and full stops correctly in more than one sentence.	In the writing tasks above, use capital letters and full stops correctly in more than one sentence, and use common linking words: and, but, then, so, that.	In the writing tasks above, punctuate many sentences accurately, including simple use of commas and question marks; begin to use paragraphs to structure writing.	In the writing tasks above, punctuate most sentences accurately; achieve some variety in sentence structure; use paragraphs; and begin to indicate speech in some way where appropriate.	In the writing tasks above, construct, punctuate and link sentences of different lengths, and organise them in paragraphs in order to shape meaning.	• Recognise the relationship between punctuation and meaning and develop confidence in using punctuations, paragraphing and sentence structure for specific effect; •independently identify and correct most errors in early drafts of written work through careful proof-reading.
Spelling	In the writing tasks above, spell accurately the words which they need to use most commonly.	In the writing tasks above, spell frequently used words accurately through using a simple wordbank or dictionary.	In the writing tasks above, spell less frequently used words with increasing confidence and accuracy.	In the writing tasks above, spell accurately most of the words they need to use in classroom activities.	In the writing tasks above, spell accurately most of the words they need to use, including specialist terminology.	• In the writing task above, spell accurately most of the words they need to use, including specialist terminology; •use a dictionary constructively and with confidence.

Handwriting and presentation	In the writing tasks above, form letters and space words legibly for the most part.	In the writing tasks above, form letters and space words legibly in linked script.	In the writing tasks above, employ a fluent, legible style of handwriting.	In the writing tasks above, employ a fluent, legible style of handwriting, and set out completed work giving attention to presentation and layout.	In the writing tasks above, employ a fluent, legible style of handwriting and set out completed work clearly and attractively.	• In the writing tasks above, employ a fluent, legible style of handwriting, and set out completed work clearly, attractively and appropriately for purpose.
Knowledge about language		Show that they know, understand and can use at least the following terms: letter, word, capital, full stop, sentence; planning, drafting, re-drafting.	Show that they know, understand and can use at least the following terms: noun, verb; comma, question mark; purpose, audience.	Show that they know, understand and can use at least the following terms: vowel and consonant; adjective, adverb, pronoun and conjunction, masculine and feminine, singular and plural; tense; paragraph.	Show that they know, understand and can use at least the following terms: main point, topic sentence, evidence; subject, predicate, clause; quotation marks, apostrophe; punctuation.	• Through regular use, consolidate their knowledge about language, including technical terms; • be prepared to reflect upon and experiment with the workings of language and its varieties.

Appendix B

Test stimulus passages

Interestingly, three of the teachers chose the passage *The Night* as the writing test stimulus, while the fourth chose *The Magic Horse*.

Passage 1: The Night

(From *The Storm Catchers* by Tim Bowter}

The sound came again, cutting through the night: a sharp, metallic tap the carried even to the first floor of the house where Sam lay sleeping. Ella stood over him and listened for it again but all she heard was the rain spattering against the window. There was a storm coming – a fine start to the summer holidays – but that wasn't the problem.

The problem was being in the house alone at ten o'clock at night looking after Sam. She wished now that Fin hadn't slipped out to see Billy but it was her own fault: she'd insisted he go, telling him Mum and Dad would never know as long as he was back before they returned from the pub.

But that could be ages. Billy's parents had gone with them, which meant Min and Mrs Meade would be yakking non-stop and Mr Meade would be trying to talk Dad into buying a new car from his showroom or joining the Save-the-Lighthouse project. They wouldn't leave the pub before eleven and Fin would take his time, especially as she'd promised him she was all right.

But she wasn't all right. She was terrified.

Passage 2: The Magic Horse

(From *Quest for a Kelpie* by Francis Mary Hendry)

Jeannie Main works as a maid in the 18th Century at the time when Bonnie Prince Charlie is trying to regain the Scottish throne. A number of things have been prophesied by a fortune teller including that she will ride a Kelpie, a magic horse, and by doing this will save her family. In a bag around her neck she has a special bone from a toad. She has also been told the works that will control the Kelpie are 'Sic Volo'. Here Jeanne tells her story. Jeanne meets what she thinks is a Kelpie.

Four feet from me stood a huge, black horse. The Kelpie.

The Kelpie was huge. It towered over me, a great black beast, its nostrils flaring gently as it snuffed at me. As granddad said, it seemed quiet enough, and it was certainly fine. It was jet black, with no hair of white. It was saddled and bridled in black, with silver buckles and bit. The saddlecloth was red. A pair of plump saddlebags were strapped to the saddle, to tempt a thief to destruction, and a pair of heavy horse-pistols.

It watched me, as I watched it. Its ears pricked forward and back, and it swung it's head and tail to chase the flies. I could hear the swish of the long hair. All around there was stillness. The sounds of the birds, the frogs, even the sound of the wind and the lapping water had died away. Nothing stirred but the Kelpie. The Kelpie merely sniffed at my chest, and nudged me with its huge nose, inviting me to mount. I knew exactly what it was thinking. Of course I did! I had the bone!

It suddenly seemed to me that this was why I was here. If anyone could ride the Kelpie, it was certainly me. I certainly had the need, I had the bone and the word. Did I also have the courage?

Appendix C

Criteria for marking the Writer's Craft tasks – Imaginative Writing

The purpose of this task is to allow students to show, in writing, their understanding of the *Writer's Craft* at the relevant level. The *Writer's Craft* task relates to the strand within the outcome of Reading, *Reading to reflect on the writer's ideas and craft (National Guidelines, English Language 5-14, pages 16 and 17)*. These tasks involve students in responding to a piece of text through discussion with the teacher, and then continuing the text using the features of the original as a model.

How to apply the criteria?

Read the piece of writing, ideally more than once. A student needs to be able to fulfil most of the description for a particular level to be awarded. If there is a problem with spelling or punctuation, for example, a level may still be achieved. If there is more than one weakness, however, it cannot be said that the student is confidently working at that level.

Table 3. **Criteria for marking the Writer's Craft tasks – imaginative writing**

Level A	The writing continues the story. Common linking words are used to organise ideas (eg and, then). Commonly used words are spelt accurately and a capital letter and a full stop are used to mark at least one sentence.
Level B	The writing continues the characters and events of the original story. Common linking words are used to organise ideas into sentences (eg and, then, but, so, that). An increased range of commonly used words are spelt accurately and punctuation is beginning to support what has been written.
Level C	The writing continues the characters, setting and events of the original story. Less commonly used words are spelt with increasing confidence and accuracy. In the main, the punctuation supports what has been written.
Level D	The writing continues the characters, setting / scene and events of the original story. The language begins to reflect the style and tone of the author. There is some variety in sentence structure. There is accurate spelling for most of the words needed for the task and most sentences are punctuated accurately.
Level E	The writing creates an accurate and convincing impression of the characters, setting / scene, atmosphere, and events. The writer demonstrates good understanding of the style and tone of the original author. There is appropriate variety in sentence structure. There is accurate spelling in the main and accurately constructed, punctuated and linked sentences.
Level F	The writing creates an accurate and convincing impression of the characters, setting / scene, atmosphere, and events. The writer makes a sustained and convincing attempt at continuing in the style and tone of the original author. There is appropriate variety in sentence structure. There is accurate spelling in the main and accurately constructed, punctuated and linked sentences.